



## THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20202

June 2006

Dear Colleague:

In this year's State of the Union address, President George W. Bush laid out a bold plan — the American Competitiveness Initiative — that speaks to the needs of Americans throughout their lifetimes. Keeping America competitive starts with an educated citizenry and an educated workforce.

I hear over and over from leaders in the business sector that staying competitive in a world that is smaller, yet more complex, requires the contributions of all citizens. We don't have a person to waste, and as we work to harness the talents of all Americans around the country, we must not overlook the contributions of people with disabilities.

When President Bush and Congress set out to reauthorize the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* in 2004, they made sure it called for states to set measurable targets for the progress of students with disabilities. It is the first law to hold schools accountable for making sure students with disabilities achieve high standards. As I like to say, the *No Child Left Behind Act* and the new *IDEA* working in concert have not only removed the final barrier separating special education from general education, they have put the needs of students with disabilities front and center.

We know that excellence in education is a workforce issue. Developing a strong future workforce is a critical factor in securing a leading position in the global economy. We have to start now to prepare students with disabilities to become well educated and skilled so that they can compete for and attain good, promising jobs that will lead to fulfilling careers and a more competitive America.

Employers know that hiring qualified, loyal employees is the cornerstone to sustained success and bottom-line results. Through special education and vocational rehabilitation, our Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) is preparing skilled youths and adults with disabilities to successfully attain and sustain quality employment and become contributing members of their communities.

A successful outcome depends on working closely with employers to understand and meet their recruiting, hiring and retention needs. Toward that end, I am pleased to share with you the latest update of *Disability Employment 101*, originally developed by OSERS and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Center for Workforce Preparation. This popular publication has proven to be a helpful resource for employers who want to stay competitive by hiring the best people.

The president has said that by reducing physical barriers and false perceptions, the country meets its commitment to millions of Americans with disabilities and benefits from their talents, creativity and hard work. We look forward to continued partnerships with employers to meet America's goals of gainful employment for all and obtaining a leading position in the global marketplace.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Margaret Spellings".

Margaret Spellings

*Our mission is to ensure equal access to education and to promote educational excellence throughout the nation.*